

Saigon 'Revolutionary' Struggles for Peace

By RICHARD CRITCHFIELD

Asian Correspondent of The Star

SAIGON—The house on Hien Vuong Street, in a pleasant, leafy residential neighborhood not far from the Buddhist Institute, had the neglected, institutional air of a YMCA in a small American town.

There was no furniture downstairs in what had been living and dining rooms except a few dusty desks and chairs. The walls were hung with inspirational mottoes and what resembled Boy Scout organizational charts with colored reproductions of rank and insignia and even merit badges.

There was a large framed photograph of a misty-eyed Vietnamese girl who looked like somebody's sweetheart. It seemed out of place until one learned she had burned herself to death in the cause of Buddhism a year before.

Two young monks, twin-like with their shaven, bony heads, black shell-rimmed glasses and brown robes, shook hands and disappeared upstairs, chattering in high-pitched singsong voices.

Behind the house was a garage and a large jerry-built hall with a corrugated tin roof. It was still early afternoon—siesta time in Saigon—and perhaps 20 young men lay sprawled sleeping on straw mats spread out on the hall's cement floor.

Two youths in undershirts played Chinese checkers, others were hitting a ping pong ball

Who are we fighting for? What are the South Vietnamese people like, how do they live, what do they think about, what do they hope for? The Star's Asian correspondent interviewed scores of Vietnamese and selected the most typical for a series of articles. In order to encourage frankness, pseudonyms are used in many of the stories. This is the third.

back and forth despite the steamy heat and outside more boys played volleyball.

In one corner of the hall, behind a partition made of flattened beer cans, several boys crouched around a youth with a guitar. Like scouts around a campfire, they softly sang:

*Men are not our enemy,
If we kill men, with whom
shall we live?
Our enemy's name is Cruelty,
Anger, Immorality and
Corruption.*

Despite the summer camp atmosphere, the house on Hien Vuong Street is the headquarters of the "Committee of Youth and Students to Safeguard the Nation," a militant group of young, mostly Buddhist Vietnamese who serve as the Saigon shock troops of the militant Buddhist monk, Thich Tri Quang.

Though nominally their leader is another monk, Thich Thien Minh, his second-in-command,

See PROFILE, Page A-8

PROFILE

'Our First Aim Is to Bring Peace'

Continued From Page A-1
the youths said Quang is their leader.

Many of the youths now napping or harmlessly engaging in the recreations of teen-agers anywhere, were recognizable as the same boys who stormed through the streets of Saigon.

They were the ringleaders of anti-government, anti-American demonstrations. They fought police and paratroopers, demanded an end to the war, early elections, that U.S. troops quit Viet Nam and had burned U.S. jeeps and stoned the foreign press.

On May Day, these same youths, this time calling themselves "Youth in the Service of Labor," had joined a peaceful trade union parade until it neared the U.S. Embassy, and then they had painted "U.S. Go Home" and "End the War" on the pavement and shouted anti-American slogans.

Their hard core, which since the crisis began in early March had all moved into the house on Hien Vuong, perhaps numbered about 50.

Their leader was one of the two boys in undershirts playing Chinese checkers. With embarrassment, he disappeared briefly to put a shirt on, the only one he owned.

Phan Lac Giang Dong—the name was an alias he chose for this story and means "Happy River of the East"—was an intense, pale, lean and wiry Vietnamese with an unruly shock of black hair which kept falling across his forehead.

He looked like a schoolboy but said he was 25. His father earned about \$30 a month as an itinerant carpenter, going from door to door in the old imperial capital of Hue, to make repairs for housewives.

Phan's brothers were a school teacher, a lieutenant in the South Vietnamese army and a student in Hue. This last and youngest, Phan said, had been beaten by soldiers and had his right leg amputated from the ankle down after riots in Hue.

Voices Contempt

Phan said he had come to Saigon three years ago to study public administration, but had spent most of his time as a semi-professional agitator. While he voiced contempt of the ways of the West, like many of Viet Nam's most xenophobic intellectuals, he was well read in contemporary French literature, especially the existentialist novels of Jean Paul Sartre, Andre Gide and Albert Camus.

He had never read Shakespeare, but said he was familiar with the poetry of India's Rabindranath Tagore.

He knew Hemingway and Steinbeck's novels, however, and seemed to view "The Grapes of Wrath" as a fairly graphic description of current American life. Phan said his two favorite novels were Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men" and Andre Malraux's "La Condition Humaine."

He was stubbornly positive that the two migrant laborers in Steinbeck's tragic novel of the 1930s were Negroes.

Asked why he chose "La Condition Humaine," Phan said, "Because it describes the fate of human beings, that is the lower classes of people, especially Asians." The novel, based on Malraux's experience as a French teacher in Saigon during the rise of the Communist party in Viet Nam, is a sympathetic fictionalized portrayal of the abortive Communist uprising in Shanghai during the 1920s. It describes the heroism, personal courage and dignity of a young Chinese Communist revolutionary, Kyo, who is eventually executed by Chiang Kai-shek's troops, who are supported by French and "foreign" financial interests.

Asked his occupation, Phan answered proudly without hesitation, "a revolutionary." He said it was illegal to read or possess the works of Marx, Lenin, Engels or Mao Tse-tung.

Future Ambition

His future ambition was "only to be a good citizen of the nation" and he said his position as a revolutionary ruled out an early marriage.

Phan praised Italian "socialist" movies, which sometimes slip past the Saigon censor. He said Japan's "Rashomon" was his favorite film, but that he "hated" popular Vietnamese opera "because of the Chinese influence." He said he preferred classical themes based on Vietnamese military victories over the Chinese.

A peculiar blend of East and West despite his rabid nationalism, Phan takes cafe au lait for breakfast rather than traditional Vietnamese noodle soup but owns only one shirt, two pairs of cotton pants and a pair of sandals. He said his "income" runs to \$30 to \$50 a month but he spends only \$10 on his personal needs.

He sleeps on a straw mat as do his "other struggle comrades." He sometimes rises at 4:00 a.m. "if I have a good idea and want to write a note on it" and has participated in every anti-government or anti-American demonstration in Saigon since early March.

Explains Aims

What was his movement struggling for?

"Our first aim," Phan said, "is to bring peace to Viet Nam. You will see. When the Vietnamese people can speak freely and have full sovereignty, they will decide to end the war." He said the election would "provide this sovereignty" and that almost all of Viet Nam's 15 million people, whether living in

government controlled areas or not, should be allowed to vote.

Then he added enigmatically that elections were "only one means to get peace."

"We Vietnamese, we want elections. But it depends on the Americans. I feel the U.S. will try and stop the election. Then we will struggle again."

Asked why he was so skeptical about the possibility of elections, Phan said, "First, the 34 people on the electoral commission represent nobody. Second, more than a month has passed already and they have done nothing toward elections."

Why, in his view, was the United States fighting in Viet Nam?

"To test their modern weapons and to solve American economic troubles. They bring their surplus farm products to sell in our markets." Phan threw up his hands in an excited gesture. "The French stayed here 100 years and never understood Viet Nam. Now the Americans stay 12 years."

"With 250,00 GIs they make a lot of trouble in our social life and cause inflation. Within a year, the cost of living in Hue has gone up 500 percent and in Saigon, 300 percent."

"War Victims"

He said Saigon's thousands of bar girls were "only war victims, who have lost their families in the countryside and must come to the city and do that dirty kind of business."

Phan dismissed the Declaration of Honolulu as an "American trick." Premier Ky's regime he described as "an American puppet government."

Phan claimed the only Vietnamese who did not want to end the war and reunify North and South Viet Nam were "American puppets and war profiteers."

He dismissed the annexation of Cambodia and Laos to form a "greater Viet Nam," as advocated by some Saigon university students, as "a Utopian idea, a Gaullist idea."

General Reassigned

The Defense Department said today Maj. Gen. Stanley J. Donovan will become commander of the 16th Air Force in Spain this summer upon departure of the present commander, Maj. Gen. Delmar E. Wilson, who is approaching retirement. Wilson is being assigned as assistant to the commander of the 15th Air Force at March Air Force Base, California.

Phan refused to discuss his technique of organizing demonstrations or which leaders he favored to form a government after elections.

Passes Out Corn

At this point a youth entered with his arms full of freshly roasted corn-on-the-cob and bolted the door behind him. Phan passed it around, explaining it was donated by women in the marketplace. The youths ate hungrily.

A second boy entered, who despite dark glasses and a paratrooper's red beret, was recognizable as the boy with the megaphone on a recent cover of Newsweek magazine. On the cover, he looked like a 13 or 14-year-old but I saw now his forehead was lined.

He said he was 20, a "high school student" and that both his parents had been murdered by French soldiers during the first Indochina War.

He carried Phan's neatly folded second pair of pants and handed him the laundry ticket.

Phan seemed to come to life as he described working as a boy in the rice paddies with his father.

"That scene is gone now because of the American bombing," said the Newsweek boy.

Judge at Selma Upholds U.S. Role In Vote Counting

SELMA, Ala. (AP)—A federal judge has upheld the right of the Justice Department to see that all the votes are counted in a disputed election in Dallas County.

At issue is whether Wilson Baker, a racial moderate, will be nominated for sheriff without a runoff, or whether he will face Sheriff James G. Clark in another primary. Clark became a symbol of segregationist resistance during weeks of racial turmoil in Selma last year.

A U.S. district judge, Daniel H. Thomas of Mobile, upheld the right of the Justice Department to intervene. The ruling cleared the way for the department to prove, if it can, that more than 1,400 Negro voters were deprived of their rights.

Those ballots, which went for Baker, were thrown out along with approximately 200 others by the county Democratic executive committee after the May 3 primary.

The Justice Department is asking the court to order the discarded votes to be counted and thus to give Baker the nomination without a runoff against Clark May 31.